

Indian Rose Annual - IRA 1988

ON THE SCENT OF "SCENT"

M. S. Viraraghavan

*The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.*

Shakespeare

No Indian would seriously dispute what Shakespeare has to say on fragrance and the rose, or quarrel with what is suggested by Sean McCann when he says that "fragrance is the heart of the rose; it is the rose's most wonderful asset; let's put it back again. I know that it isn't easy to say, 'I'm going to breed a fragrant rose here' - but it might be worth a try. At present most hybridisers work with varieties that provide health, growth and good blooms. Now let them start working on fragrance too with the same enthusiasm¹.

How does one start breeding for fragrant roses, especially when many modern varieties, otherwise colourful and beautiful are utterly lacking in fragrance? If we recall that fragrance is generally a recessive characteristic, and take into account the fact that rose hybridization has concentrated on other aspects, this would seem to be very difficult indeed. But the problem is not really all that intractable - as is evident if we analyse the breeding lines which have contributed to the fragrant roses of today².

Relying on Sean McCann again, some of today's most fragrant bush roses are Scented Air, Ena Harkness, Fragrant Cloud, Margaret Merrill, Fountain, Royal Gold, Radox Bouquet and Double Delight; and among the climbers, Compassion, Breath of Life, and Rosy Mantle. To this list we may

add Papa Meilland, Oklahoma, Sutter's Gold, Tiffany and Lemon Spice as among the most fragrant roses grown in India. As I said earlier, the source of fragrance becomes more obvious if we analyze the breeding lines, but what is very interesting, if not sensational is the fact that.....no, I won't ruin a good detective story by revealing the denouement in the beginning!

The quest for the source of fragrance, as shown by the analysis which is detailed below, starts with the famous parent rose, Lady Mary Fitzwilliam, raised by the pioneering English hybridiser, Henry Bennett in 1882. A cross of Devonienses, a Tea rose which is still widely grown in India, and Victor Verdier, an early Hybrid Perpetual, this rose, flesh pink in colour is described as very large, globular and very fragrant.

Starting with Lady Mary Fitzwilliam the two giant steps taken to produce the fragrant line were the release of the H.T., Mme. Caroline Testout in 1890 - a rose so popular in its time that it was once planted by the thousands along the streets of Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. - and the raising of Ophelia (1912), which, with its numerous sports, was the standby of the cut flower trade for nearly two decades. Mme. Carolina Testout led via Catherine Kordes (1930), to the production of one of the most fragrant of red roses, Crimson Glory in 1935, at the hands of Wilhelm Kordes. An interesting feature is that the progenitor of Crimson Glory, Catherine Kordes, could also be linked to Ophelia via the red H.T. Sensation (1922).

Leaving the line starting with Lady Mary Fitzwilliam for the present, another major development which contributed to the evolution of fragrant roses was the raising of the first rose with the 'blood' of the Persian yellow - Soleil d'Or, in 1900³. The cross was between Antoine Ducher, a Hybrid Perpetual released in 1866 and the Persian yellow rose, a semi-double mutant of *Rosa foetida*, the golden rose of Persia. Further hybridization with Soleil d'Or led, in the hands of the great French hybridizer, Pernet

Ducher, to the introduction of one of the most famous of yellow roses, Souvenir de Claudius Pernet in 1920, which in turn, produced further on yellow/bicolour roses such as Julien Potin (1927), Talisman (1929), and Soeur Thérèse (1931). Curiously enough, Crimson Glory, via Catherine Kordes, was not only the meeting point of the lines starting from Mme. Caroline Testout and Ophelia, but included a direct link with Soleil d'Or, Crimson Glory apart, a rose of great importance in the development of rose fragrance is the glamorous Signora (1936), a breathtaking medley of orange apricot, suffused gold, with an incomparable fragrance - a rose which I have grown but, alas, lost. It will probably not come as too much of a surprise if I say that the parentage of this rose too can be traced to Ophelia via Sensation, as also to Soleil d'Or via Julien Potin.

The third of this trio of important parent roses in Charlotte Armstrong, a pink H.T. (1940) derived from Crimson Glory, and again including a direct link to Soleil d'Or, this time via Souer Therese.

Before taking up the parentage of the fragrant roses of today, one more very influential rose should be mentioned - viz., Peace, (1945), which again is in the direct line from Soleil d'Or via Souvenir de Claudius Pernet.

What then is the link between these roses - Crimson Glory, Signora, Charlotte Armstrong and Peace - to today's fragrant roses? Starting with reds, we may note that Ena Harkness (1946) (one of the two red roses in Sean McCann's list quoted earlier) is directly derived from Crimson Glory. Also derived from Crimson Glory via Charlotte Armstrong, are the further advances in red roses - Papa Meilland (1963), Oklahoma (1964) and Mr. Lincoln (1964). Another very fragrant rose, still widely grown, Sutter's Gold, (1950), is similarly derived from Charlotte Armstrong, intercrossed with Signora. One more scented rose, Tiffany, (1954), is from Charlotte Armstrong, to which is added the influence of Talisman, which you may note, is directly in the line from Soleil d'Or, and also, a direct derivative of

Ophelia. Again, Lemon Spice (1966) is Charlotte Armstrong combined with Julien Potin. To bring the story almost up to the present, Double Delight, (1977), is derived from Charlotte Armstrong, with a dose of Tiffany, and from Soleil d'Or' via Peace.

Going back to Peace, we may note that perhaps the most fragrant of all roses, Fragrant Cloud (1963), is in the direct line from Peace via Prima Ballerina (1957). Unfortunately, the full parentages of Prima Ballerina and Fragrant Cloud have not been revealed by the raiser, Matthias Tantau, but we may infer, as being roses released almost simultaneously with Super Star (1960), by the same raiser, and in the same colour range, that the parentage is quite similar⁴. It will at this stage come as no surprise that the parentage of Super Star can be directly linked to Mme. Caroline Testout, Crimson Glory and Soleil d'Or - i.e. the mixture as before, to which is added the influence of two rose species, *Rosa multibracteata* and *Rosa roxburghii* - entering the 'bloodline' for the first time. We can guess that this combination of genes and, particularly, the infusion of fresh blood via the two rose species is responsible for that special and characteristic intensification of fragrance in Fragrant Cloud, which is a fragrance very distinct indeed from the damask fragrance of Crimson Glory.

Fragrant Cloud has been responsible for the production of many scented roses, including Tenerife, (1972), Forgotten Dreams, (1981), Dolly Parton (1984), (crossed with Oklahoma), Velvet Fragrance (1987), as also Radox Bouquet (1980) -one more in Sean McCann's list. Similarly, the climbers Rosy Mantle (1965), and Compassion (1972), both in McCann's list, can be directly traced back to Prima Ballerina.

Taking up another of McCann's choices, Margaret Merrill (1977), we may note that this again is from the same line, with the parentage traceable back to Ophelia, to Charlotte Armstrong and to Julien Potin. But what, in my view, makes the scent of Margaret Merrill so very special - it is

one of the few roses which are very fragrant even at the tight bud stage - is the infusion of the blood of *Rosa rubiginosa* via the Floribunda, Rudolph Timm. This, of course, is the merest speculation, but it is logical to look for fresh genes to explain unusual characteristics. Margaret Merrill has proved to be the answer to the rose breeder's dream, if that dream is the production of fragrant roses; for, crossing with Violaine, Margaret Merrill led to Rajni (1984), one of the most fragrant of roses in the pink lilac range, with again, the characteristic of being fragrant even at the bud stage. Almost every seedling of Rajni is fragrant, e.g. Somasila (Pristine x Rajni) (1987), and there are many others in the pipeline.

Other scented roses in McCann's list are traceable to the same lines - Breath of Life (climber) to Ena Harkness, and Scented Air to Charlotte Armstrong and to Crimson Glory more directly via the Floribunda, Fashion (1949), the parentage of which is also directly traceable to Ophelia and to Julien Potin.

This brings us to the subject of fragrant floribundas, most of which can be traced back to Fashion. From Fashion came two important floribundas, Spartan (1955), and Little Darling, (1956). From Spartan comes Elizabeth of Glamis (1965), the first floribunda ever to win the Fragrance Cup of the Royal National Rose Society.

So what does this analysis of the parentage of fragrant roses reveal? Quite clearly, almost all the roses in Sean McCann's list, or the others mentioned by me at the beginning of this article, are in the direct line from Mme. Caroline Testout and Ophelia. But what is intriguing - and, of course, this is again mere speculation - is that the quality of fragrance seems to be much enhanced when a new species is brought in. This has happened on several occasions. Initially, when the blood of *R. foetida* came in; again, when *R. multibracteata* and *R. roxburghii* were brought in into the Fragrant Cloud line; once more when *R. rubiginosa* was added to

the mix to create Margaret Merrill; and again, when *R. spinosissima* and *R. rubiginosa* were both added to evolve Radox Bouquet. And yet again, when the fragrant flouribunda roses were evolved by adding a dash of the polyantha genes. What then is the prescription for breeding a fragrant rose? In my view, but of course I am sticking my neck out here, we should concentrate on raising roses from Fragrant Cloud, Double Delight, and most of all, from Margaret Merrill, inter-crossed with others of similar genetic background; but to finish in ablaze of controversy, may I say that even more spectacular results would hopefully emerge if we bring in new rose species into these lines.

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1. 'McCann on Roses' : 'The Rose', February 1987, RNRS UK
2. 'The Makers of Heavenly Roses': Jack Harkness, Pg. 118
3. 'The Rose': A Complete Handbook: Roy Genders, Ch. 6
4. Ibid (same as No. 3)

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VAMSADHARA — H. T. M. S. Viraraghavan
Introduced K. S. G. Son. 1988
(Seedling x Silver Star)



TAMARABARANI — H. T. M. S. Vitaraghavan
Introduced K. S. G. Son 1988

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3. 'The Rose: A Complete Handbook': Roy Genders Ch. 8.
4. *Ibid.*